

# Reviews help you select software

If you're thinking about buying new software for your computer or, if it's your job to find new software for your department or company, it makes sense for you to get as many opinions as possible.

In many corporations it's politically astute to collect as many published reviews of software as possible to support your purchase decisions. It could be a job-saver for you, especially if your company is buying dozens of copies.

So, here is a list of my favorite sources for reviews and information. They are all worth subscribing to if your company is constantly in the market for new software.

InfoWorld, a weekly magazine, is the publication I like the best. It's consistently the best source for reviews of IBM-compatible or Macintosh software. Each week, several new programs get in-depth descriptions and critiques, including ratings on a scale from one to 10. InfoWorld is quick to publish reviews, so if you're looking for information about something really new, there's a good chance this magazine will have a review about it soon after the package is released.



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ed. Issues cost \$2.95 each and are available at computer stores and many newsstands. PC Magazine is my second choice. It's subtitled The Independent Guide to IBM-Standard Personal Computing, and its articles and reviews are excellent. But PC Magazine, which comes out twice a month with more than 400 pages of articles and advertising, can easily be overwhelming. For people who really want to submerge themselves in the current literature about IBM-compatible machines, PC Magazine should be at the top of the reading list. The cost: \$2.95 a copy.

If you or your company are buying software for a Macintosh, your first or second source of reviews should be MacWorld, a monthly magazine devoted to that machine. It too, however, is set up for seri-

ous folks, with nearly 300 pages of ads and excellent articles. Each issue costs \$3.95.

PCWorld also is an excellent but slightly more technical choice for the IBM-compatible computer user. It's published by the same people who produce MacWorld. It's also monthly and bulky and runs \$2.95 an issue.

Software Digest's Ratings Report is a collection of PC software reviews that comes out on a different topic every month. It's tailored more for people who are buying software for large corporations, because it provides detailed benchmark comparisons of the various products and their features. With its wealth of statistics about every program on the market, you can use it to support almost any purchasing decision that you've already made. Software Digest is available by annual subscription for \$295 from National Software Testing Laboratories in Philadelphia, tel. (800) 223-7093.

Personal Computer Review Squared — PCR2 for short — is a new monthly that prints hundreds of abstracts of software and hard-

ware reviews. It's useful in that it tells you where you can find reviews for specific packages. But as a decision-making resource in itself, the abstracts are so abbreviated that they don't impart much helpful information. This publication costs \$60 yearly, and is available from Toolbox Publications, Orchard Lake, Mich., (800) 638-3450. It would make a good library resource, but unless you regularly need to locate all the reviews for some specific item, I don't suggest you include this one on your reading list.

The bottom line: Since it's politically astute to back up your software choices with published reviews, I suggest you check with these sources regularly. But if you're looking for just one subscription to keep you on top of the market, I recommend InfoWorld as the best of the bunch.

*Hillel Segal's column has been broadened to include evaluations of gadgets, seminars and books designed to enhance business productivity. Segal is a management consultant based in Boulder.*